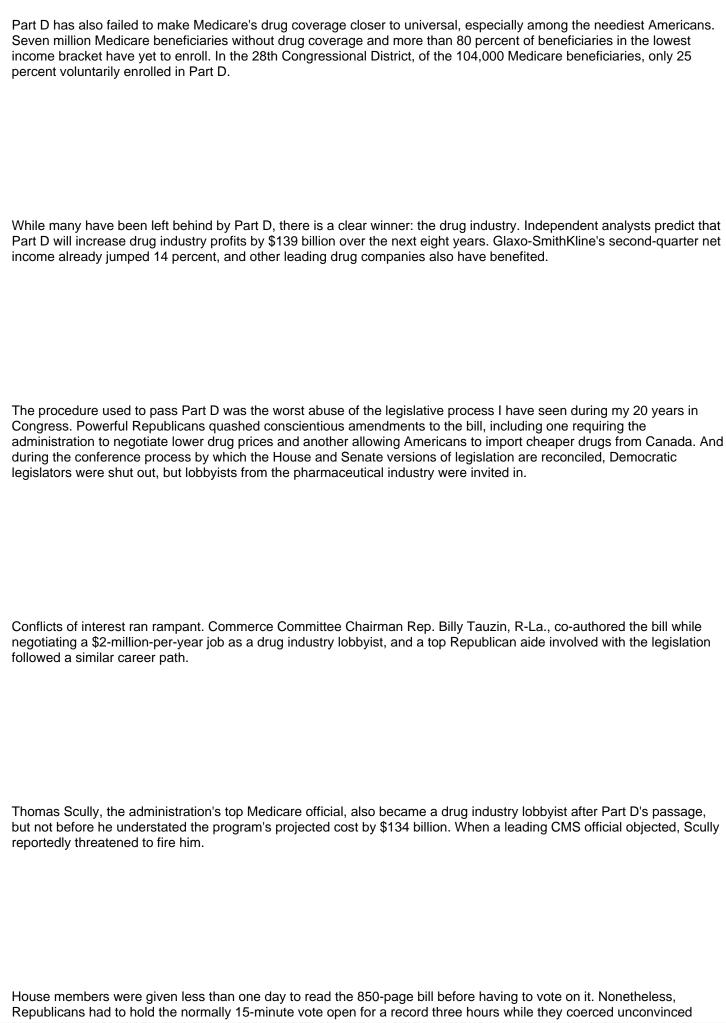
## Give Medicare program total overhaul- August 21, 2006

Give Medicare program total overhaul; don't just fill 'doughnut hole'
Rep. Louise Slaughter  Democrat and Chronicle August 21, 2006
(August 21, 2006) - The Medicare Part D drug plan passed by Congress has failed to provide affordable drug coverage for needy Americans. The problems with the legislation are so large and systemic that Band-Aid fixes won't help. An entirely new bill is needed.
Recent criticisms of Part D have focused on the so-called "doughnut hole" rule in which beneficiaries must cover all annual expenses between \$2,251 and \$5,100 - a hole in their coverage. But while this flaw will cost patients money and is expected to hurt as many as 7 million seniors and people living with disabilities this year, it is just the tip of the iceberg
Part D does not allow the administration to negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies. These companies are charging taxpayers up to 80 percent more for drugs purchased under Part D than for those purchased under other plans Furthermore, it prevents the re-importation of cheaper medications from Canada.
Implementation of the program was barely considered, and the result has been chaos. Millions of seniors had little time and information when choosing a drug plan. An underperforming Medicare toll-free hotline let even more consumers fall through the cracks, and faulty Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services eligibility data produced regular prescription denials. Many states had to declare emergencies to ensure recipients continued to receive their medications. Both beneficiaries and pharmacists regularly paid out-of-pocket costs to ensure treatment continuity.

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members into changing their minds.
A corrupted legislative process produced a Medicare bill that violates Medicare's tradition, spirit and intent. My constituents and millions of Americans are now paying the price.
Several short-term fixes are obvious. The secretary of Health and Human Services ought to negotiate directly for lower drug prices. We need to simplify the types of plans offered and eliminate the doughnut hole. And doctors, not insurance-company bureaucrats, should decide which drugs patients need. Democrats have fought for all of these changes, and will continue to do so.
But in the end, we must take Part D back to the drawing board, and at the same time fix the broken branch of government called Congress that continues to give us indefensible bills like this one.

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